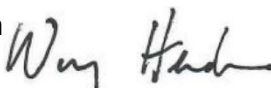


To: DCF/DMCPS Administrator
DCF Area Administrators
Child Placing Agency Directors
Child Welfare Agency Directors
County Departments of Community Programs Directors
County Departments of Human Services Directors
County Departments of Social Services Directors
Group Home Providers
Tribal Social Service/Indian Child Welfare Directors
Private Child Placing Agencies
Residential Care Center Providers
Shelter Care Providers
Tribal Chairpersons

From: Wendy Henderson
Administrator 

Re: **Supporting Foster Youth and Families Through the Pandemic Act**

PURPOSE

The purpose of this memo is to provide the process for Chafee funding and policy guidance to counties, Transition Resource Agencies, and tribal Independent Living programs for implementation of the requirements of Division X of the 2021 Consolidated Appropriations Act: Supporting Foster Youth and Families Through the Pandemic.

BACKGROUND

In December 2020, Congress passed the Consolidated Appropriations Act. Division X, the Supporting Foster Youth and Families Through the Pandemic Act, includes provisions regarding supports for foster youth and families. These provisions include requirements that youth not age out of care and that they be permitted to re-enter care during the period of the pandemic, defined in the law as January 27, 2020 through September 30, 2021. The Act also provided additional Chafee funding and flexibilities in use of funds. In program instructions issued in March 2021, the Administration for Children and Families provided additional direction stipulating that:

For purposes of meeting the temporary suspension of aging out of foster care and permitting re-entry of youth who have left foster care, title IV-E agencies may use a definition of foster care that does not fully accord with the definition used for the purposes of title IV-E in 45 CFR 1355.20. For example, a title IV-E agency could allow a youth to re-enter foster care without extending title IV-E agency placement and care to that youth, while still providing monthly financial support, age-appropriate supervision, and case management services (ACYF-CB-PI-21-04, p. 4).

Based on Wisconsin's Independent Living service model, Wisconsin will use the increased funding and fulfill the associated requirements through a combination of funding to county and tribal child welfare agencies and to agencies contracted to provide independent living services to youth. Any youth who has aged out of care, or will age out of care, during the period from January 27, 2020 through September 30, 2021 will be entitled to monthly financial support, age-

appropriate supervision, and case management services provided by the Transition Resource Agencies (TRAs) as required by the Act. In addition, DCF is providing funding to counties, tribes, and other youth-serving partners to provide additional independent living supports for youth.

INFORMATION SUMMARY

County Child Welfare Agencies:

As outlined in the May 7, 2020, policy guidance (updated April 26, 2021), for youth who are living in a foster home, agencies are encouraged to work with the youth, the foster family, and the licensing agency to determine whether the youth may be able to voluntarily remain in the home after aging out until alternative housing is available (e.g., until beginning college, or due to delays in finding an apartment during the pandemic). The DCF Exceptions Panel will be as flexible as possible on any foster care licensing exceptions necessary to allow the youth to remain in the home as a household member.

Using the increased Chafee funding made available through the Supporting Foster Youth and Families through the Pandemic Act, DCF will provide additional funding to counties to assist in transitioning youth from out-of-home care placement to regional independent living services. These **funds may be used** for:

- The cost of one-time payments to support maintaining youth in their previous placement home as described above, following the same process outlined in [Informational Memo 2020-19i](#) (Funding to Support Youth Aging Out of Care During COVID-19).
 - DCF will reimburse payments for youth who aged out of care or will age out of care between April 2021 and the discontinuation of funding availability (described below).
 - Payments made to support the youth remaining in the home of their most recent placement should be no more than the previous monthly foster care rate.
 - Payment may be made for up to three months.
 - Youth remaining in their previous placement home with this support after their out-of-home care placement order ends remain eligible for other TRA-provided services and supports, including direct payments for youth who qualify, and counties shall continue to facilitate transition of youth to TRA services.
- Costs for independent living-related services and supports for youth while still in out-of-home care placement. These may include:
 - Driver's education, driver licensing, and insurance costs (not to exceed \$4,000 per youth).
 - Transportation costs (such as bus passes or gas cards) needed for education, employment, and transition to adulthood activities.
 - Costs such as laptops, cell phones, books, or other supplies.
 - Other resources to benefit youth as they transition to adulthood.

For youth to receive supports using funds from the Supporting Foster Youth and Families through the Pandemic Act, they must be eligible for independent living services. Full eligibility is described in [DCF's Independent Living Eligibility guide](#). In summary:

- Youth receiving supports while still in an out-of-home care placement are to be served by their county/tribe. They must be at least 14 years old and be in a court-ordered qualifying placement for a minimum of six months OR be 17.5 years old or older and be in a court-ordered qualifying placement for any amount of time on or after that age.

- Youth receiving housing supports from their county/tribe up to three months after exiting an out-of-home care placement and/or broader IL services from a Transition Resource Agency must have exited care in a way that qualifies them for continued IL services following time in care. This includes entering court-ordered Chapter 48 guardianship or being adopted after 16th birthday following time in a court-ordered out-of-home care placement or exiting a qualifying court-ordered placement at age 18 or older (“aged out”).

These **funds may not be used** for any of the following:

- Costs for placement in court-ordered out-of-home care, including any costs qualifying for IV-E maintenance payments.
- Services or support for youth who are no longer in out-of-home placement, with the exception of payments to allow the youth to remain in the home of their previous placement as described above. Other supports and services for youth who have aged out of care will be the responsibility of the TRA.
- Supplanting or replacing funding from any other source. Staffing costs are only eligible if they are new expenses incurred specifically for this purpose.

Counties must use the one-time payment mechanism in eWiSACWIS to provide payment when children are continuing to live in their previous placement home or with another individual supported by the county. Directions for entering COVID19 Youth Aging Out one-time payments can be found in the User Guide: [Creating a COVID-Youth Aging Out One-Time Payment](#).

eWiSACWIS COVID-19 Youth Aging Out Payment Schedule

	County COVID-19 Youth Aging Out Payment In eWiSACWIS	eWiSACWIS Electronic Payment File Available to Counties	Families Receive County Payment*	County Receives DCF Reimbursement Via SPARC
1 st payment	by 5 p.m. Monday, May 3	Thursday, May 6	Friday, May 7	Friday, May 7
2 nd payment	by 5 p.m. Tuesday, June 1	Friday, June 4	Friday, June 4	Friday, June 4
3 rd payment	by 5 p.m. Thursday, July 1	Wednesday, July 7	Friday, July 9	Friday, July 9
4 th payment	by 5 p.m. Monday, August 2	Thursday, August 5	Friday, August 6	Friday, August 6
5 th payment	by 5 p.m. Wednesday, September 1	Tuesday, September 7	Friday, September 10	Friday, September 10
6 th payment	by 5 p.m. Friday, October 1	Wednesday, October 6	Friday, October 8	Friday, October 8

*may vary by county

DCF will reimburse 100% of placement stability costs that were entered into eWiSACWIS as per the schedule above. Reimbursement will be made via SPARC Contract Code 3620. Counties do not need to enter anything into the SPARC portal; expense entry will be done by DCF.

Counties should use SPARC Code 3621 to enter costs related to independent living-related services and supports. Counties are strongly encouraged to enter costs monthly, as reimbursements may not be made once funding is no longer available.

The Department will provide an amendment to the state/county contract for the increased costs

for payments issued as outlined above. Counties are encouraged to sign the contract amendment as quickly as possible. Payments cannot be issued until the amendment is signed.

Individual county contracts will not include a specified reimbursement amount due to the anticipated variability of expenses across counties. The Department expects to have funding available through September 2021 and may continue availability beyond that date. The Department will closely monitor expenditure of funds and notify counties when these expenses are no longer eligible for reimbursement.

Transition Resource Agencies:

Each TRA will receive funding to meet the Act's aging out and re-entry requirements through a combination of required direct monthly financial support, age-appropriate supervision, and case management services to youth who aged out of court-ordered out-of-home care placement between January 27, 2020 and September 30, 2021.

Funding will also be provided to TRAs to support IL-eligible youth's needs more broadly. Specifically, this additional funding will enable IL eligibility to age 23 (through December 2022), increase maximum Education and Training Voucher (ETV) awards to up to \$12,000 per academic year per youth (through December 2022), extend ETV eligibility to include graduate-level post-secondary degrees, and provide additional general independent living supports for youth.

The funding increases, required payments and supports for the aging-out cohort, and programmatic flexibilities are outlined in amendments to the TRA contracts.

Additional Supports:

Tribes currently receiving Independent Living funds from the Department have the option to receive additional funding. A referral process for youth served through Indian Child Welfare agencies with court-ordered out-of-home care placements ending between January 27, 2020 and September 30, 2021 is being developed to ensure equal access to these resources. More information will be provided at the May Indian Child Welfare Directors meeting.

Additional funding will also be provided to the two Positive connections, Academic support, Training and employment, Housing and Social/emotional support (PATHS) programs. PATHS serves Independent Living eligible youth who are homeless or at risk of homelessness through a comprehensive housing first model.

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Out-of-Home Care Section
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MEMO WEB SITE:

<https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/cwportal/policy>